

ALEXANDRE DUMAS (PÈRE)

The Count of Monte Cristo

Adapted by H.Q. Mitchell - Marileni Malkogianni



level

5

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CHAPTER 1

ON THE 24TH OF FEBRUARY, THE GREAT SHIP *PHARAOH* ARRIVED in Marseilles from Smyrna.

‘Welcome back!’ said Morrel, the proud owner, who had just got onto the ship.

‘Ah, sir, something terrible has happened,’ said the slim young man that rushed to greet him.

‘What do you mean, Dantes?’ asked Morrel, obviously worried about the cargo.

‘Just off the coast of Civita Vecchia we lost our brave Captain Leclere to a very bad fever. The cargo, however, is safe and sound,’ said Dantes.

‘How terrible indeed,’ said Morrel sadly. ‘But we are all mortal, and the old must make way for the young.’

‘I must leave you now, sir. I must anchor this ship. Monsieur Danglars, the cargo supervisor, is now coming this way. He will help you with all you may need.’

‘Let go!’ Dantes called out to the crew, and the anchor was instantly dropped.

‘He is so young, yet arrogant enough to believe he can run this ship,’ said Danglars to Monsieur Morrel.

‘Well, a sailor does not need to be old to know his business,’ replied Morrel. ‘Edmond Dantes seems to know his very well. Why should he not be captain?’

Danglars stared at Edmond with eyes full of hate. ‘Yes, he took command of the ship immediately after the captain’s death, though we wasted a day and a half when he made us stop at the island of Elba.’

Morrel seemed surprised on hearing this.

‘Dantes,’ he called out, ‘come this way!’

Danglars took two or three steps back.

‘I would like to know why you stopped at the island of Elba,’ asked Morrel.

Dantes immediately explained that this had been Leclere’s last order. He told Morrel that he had no idea why the captain had



wanted to go there, and that he had met the Emperor Napoleon himself, who gave him a sealed letter which he was to deliver to the club of Bonapartists in Paris.

Morrel, also a Bonapartist, seemed pleased to hear this. Napoleon was now exiled in Elba, and King Louis had returned to the throne. The king was very suspicious of whoever showed the slightest sign of being against him.

‘Let’s dine together,’ offered Morrel to Dantes.

‘Thank you, sir, but I owe the first visit to my father. Do you know how my father is?’

‘He is usually shut up in his room. Other than that, I do not know much. After you have visited him, will you come and join me?’ repeated Morrel.

‘I am afraid not, sir. I owe my second visit to the very fine girl I have returned to marry,’ was the answer.

Morrel smiled. He always knew Dantes was a very dedicated young man to those he cared for.

‘Well, my dear Edmond, don’t let me keep you then.’

Dantes entered the small house his father lived in while the old man was watering his flowers.

‘Father, dear Father!’ he cried out.

The old man turned around in great surprise and fell, pale and trembling, into his son’s arms.

‘Are you ill, Father?’ asked Dantes.

‘No, my son. I wasn’t expecting you so soon. Come, tell me about you,’ said his father.

‘Well, Captain Leclerc died, and I will take his place, which is more than a poor sailor like me can ever hope for,’ said Edmond.

‘Yes,’ replied the old man. ‘This is truly a great thing for you.’

‘Father,’ said Dantes. ‘Have you needed money? I had given you two hundred francs when I left three months ago.’

‘Yes, Edmond, that is true, but our neighbour Caderousse constantly reminded me of some money you owed him, and he told me that he would ask Monsieur Morrel for the money if I didn’t give it to him. So, I paid him,’ said the old Dantes.

‘Oh, but you gave almost all your money for me; I promise you



this will never happen again,' said Edmond.

'Never mind,' said the old man; 'Now that you are here, everything is all right again.'

Dantes emptied his pockets and put a dozen gold pieces, five or six francs and a few smaller coins on the table.

At that point, Caderousse entered the room. Dantes saw a greedy glance in the man's eyes, as he stared at the table.

'I have come to shake your hand, my friend. Danglars told me some great news,' he said.

'Thank you, my friend,' Dantes said, knowing that Caderousse was a man whose lips said one thing, while his heart thought another. 'But I cannot stay any longer. Father, I ask permission to leave you and pay a visit to the Catalans.'

The fishing village of the Catalans was set in a bare landscape near Marseilles. There was a beautiful Catalan girl there called Mercedes that the young Dantes had fallen in love with.

In one of the small stone houses Mercedes sat with one of her cousins, Fernand, who was trying desperately to convince her to marry him instead of Dantes.

'I will marry no one else but Edmond Dantes; he is the one I love. How many times must I tell you?' said the girl, and her black eyes sparkled.

'And if he is dead?' asked Fernand.

'I will die too,' was the reply.

'What if he has forgotten you, Mercedes, what then?' he insisted.

'Mercedes!' called a voice outside just then, and Dantes walked in.

'Ah!' exclaimed the young girl. 'You see, he has not forgotten me. Here he is! Oh, my dear Edmond!'

Fernand drew back when Dantes extended his hand to greet him as if he had seen a snake.

'Fernand is my cousin and a good friend,' Mercedes said, turning angry eyes at the man. 'Shake hands with Edmond, Fernand.'

The Catalan gave Edmond his hand. Then, unable to control his sadness, he ran out of the house. As he was running away furiously, he came across Caderousse and Danglars, who were sitting at an inn just outside the village.



‘You look like you want to throw yourself into the sea,’ Caderousse called out to Fernand. ‘You had not expected Dantes to return so suddenly, is that not right? Come and sit with us.’

‘He has come to marry her, to take her from me forever! How can I stop him?’ said the young man in despair.

Danglars pulled a piece of paper out of his coat.

‘What is that?’ Caderousse asked.

‘It is a letter to Monsieur Villefort, the prosecutor of Marseilles, informing him that Dantes is a Bonapartist. I have written to him about Dantes’ trip to the island of Elba and about the letter he had to deliver to the Bonapartists of Paris. This information is enough to send Dantes to prison forever,’ said Danglars, who wanted to become captain of the *Pharaoh* instead of Edmond Dantes.

‘Why?’ Caderousse asked, ‘Dantes is a good man. He has harmed no one. Get rid of this letter!’

Fernand eagerly stared at the letter.

‘All right then. If that is what you wish.’ Danglars crumpled the letter and threw it on the ground.

‘Let us go then,’ he said, and took Caderousse by the arm, leading him away from the table.

As they walked away, Danglars turned around and saw Fernand picking up the crumpled letter. He smiled with satisfaction, knowing that nothing would stop the evil that would soon fall upon Edmond Dantes.

